

A Second Resignation from the Soviet Academy

To the President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

I have come to the conclusion that I ought to resign the Honorary Membership of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., to which I was elected in May, 1942.

When your distinguished predecessor Academician V. L. Komarov, wrote to inform me of the honour thus conferred upon me, his letter made reference to the fact that I was then President of the Royal Society of London. I believe that many British scientists, indeed, recognised and welcomed my election at that time as the symbol of a community of purpose between the scientists of our two nations, which had then been engaged together for nearly a year in the war against Hitler's Germany—in defending, as we believed, the freedom of Science, as of all man's proper activities, from the threat of an aggressive tyranny.

In that same year, 1942, the Royal Society of London elected Nicholas Ivanovitch Vavilov to be one of its fifty Foreign Members. With Lenin's support and encouragement he had been able, as first Director of the Lenin Academy of Genetics, to initiate and promote a rapidly growing contribution, by research in the U.S.S.R., to that world-wide advance in the science of Genetics which had followed the recognition of Mendel's discoveries. His use of these opportunities was reputed to have been of great benefit to Agriculture in the Soviet Union; we desired to honour it as a great contribution to Science for the whole world.

It had been reported in Britain, however, already in 1942, that N.I. Vavilov had somehow fallen from favour with those who came after Lenin, though the cause of his trouble was still unknown; we might have supposed it to be political, or otherwise irrelevant to his scientific achievement. Not till 1945 did the Royal Society discover that he had been dismissed from his position, had disappeared with a number of his co-workers in Genetics, and had died at some unknown date between 1941 and 1943. Repeated enquiries, addressed to your Academy by the Royal Society through all available channels, asking only the date and the place of his death, received no reply of any kind. I understand that the Royal Society has not yet been officially informed whether this distinguished Russian scientist was still alive at the time of his election to its Foreign Membership.

More recent events, of which full reports have come to hand, have made it clear what has happened. The late N.I. Vavilov had been replaced by T. D. Lysenko, the advocate of a doctrine of evolution which, in fact, denies all the progress made by research in that field since Lamarck's speculations appeared early in the nineteenth century. Though Darwin's work is still formally acknow-

ledged in the U.S.S.R., his essential discovery is now to be rejected there. The whole great fabric of exact knowledge, still growing at the hands of those who have followed Mendel, Bateson and Morgan, is to be repudiated and denounced; and the last few, who were still contributing to it in the U.S.S.R., have now been deprived of position and opportunity.

This is not the result of an honest and open conflict of scientific opinions; Lysenko's own claim and statements make it clear that his dogma has been established and enforced by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, as conforming to the political philosophy of Marx and Lenin. Many of us, Mr. President, have been proud to think that there were no political frontiers or national varieties in a Science common to all the world; but this is now to be separated from "Soviet Science" and repudiated as "bourgeois" and "capitalistic".

Decrees which the Presidium of your Academy has issued, on August 27th of this year, give effect only too clearly to this political tyranny. My old and honoured friends, Academician L. Orbeli, distinguished neurophysiologist of the school of your great Pavlov, is dismissed from his Secretaryship of your Academy's Department of Biological Sciences, because he has failed to anticipate your Decrees, in their restriction of all research and teaching in Genetics in the U.S.S.R. to this politically imposed orthodoxy. It remains to be seen whether such compliance with dogma is to be exacted in other departments of Science. So far we know only that the Genetics encouraged by Lenin is now prohibited as alien to his political philosophy.

Since Galileo was driven by threats to his historic denial, there have been many attempts to suppress or to mutilate scientific truth in the interests of some extraneous creed, but none has had a lasting success; Hitler's was the most recent failure. Believing Mr. President, that you and your colleagues must be acting under a like coercion, I can only offer you my respectful sympathy. For my own part, being free to choose, I believe that I should do disservice even to my scientific colleagues in the U.S.S.R., if I were to retain an association in which I might appear to condone the actions by which your Academy, under whatever compulsion, is now responsible for such a terrible injury to the freedom and the integrity of Science.

With deep regret, I must ask you to accept my resignation.—Yours faithfully,

HENRY H. DALE.

London, 22nd November, 1948.

(Sir Henry Dale, late president of the Royal Society, is the second Nobel Prize winner to resign over this controversy).

Letter to the Editor

SIR,

Perhaps you will allow me to add something to the Russian genetics controversy. In 1933 I spent several months in the Soviet Union and visited many of the Experiment Stations and Research Institutes of that country in company with N. I. Vavilov. I saw Lysenko in Odessa catechised him for several hours and inspected his practical work. It was quite clear that Lysenko was blazingly ignorant of the elementary principles of both plant physiology and genetics, and that he was just a biological circle-squaring Ukrainian peasant—capable of fooling politicians, but not scientists. You simply couldn't talk to Lysenko—it was like discussing the differential calculus with a man who did not know his 12-times table. When I say that some of his assistants were using plant pots without drainage holes, your amateur gardening readers will understand.

After much persuasion Lysenko gave me a formula for vernalising cotton seed. After giving the method a full trial, we found that it just didn't work.

Many of the results that he and his collaborators obtained later are plainly faked, and it is pretty clear that the substitution of the Lysenko-Michurin methods for the accepted technology of applied genetics has put back the Soviet Union into the bow-and-arrow category so far as world science is concerned.

The root of the trouble is this. We are floundering in a new sort of world in which we must leave many things to experts. Who is to choose the expert, and how do you know that he is an authentic specimen when you have got him? In many cases the expert is chosen because he shouts *I am an expert* so loudly and convincingly that the poor simple politician believes him, and puts him in a position of great authority. The real experts are known only to a small coterie of their fellow workers, and are unknown either to the politician or to the general public.

The fact is that you can go on talking nonsense for years about biology without getting found out, and you can even promise miracles to the politician and get away with it, as Lysenko has done. In mathematics it is somewhat different, for 2 and 2 still make 4 both in our own bourgeois science and in that of the Soviet Union. That seems to be about the only point on which our two sorts of science still agree.

Lamentable it is to see the once brilliant Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. become a pseudo-scientific Dotheboys Hall with Trofim Lysenko cracking his whip and playing the part of Wackford Squeers.

Yours, etc.,

S. C. HARLAND

(Dr. Harland, F.R.S., is of course one of the world's foremost authorities on applied genetics, and a specialist in cotton breeding).



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